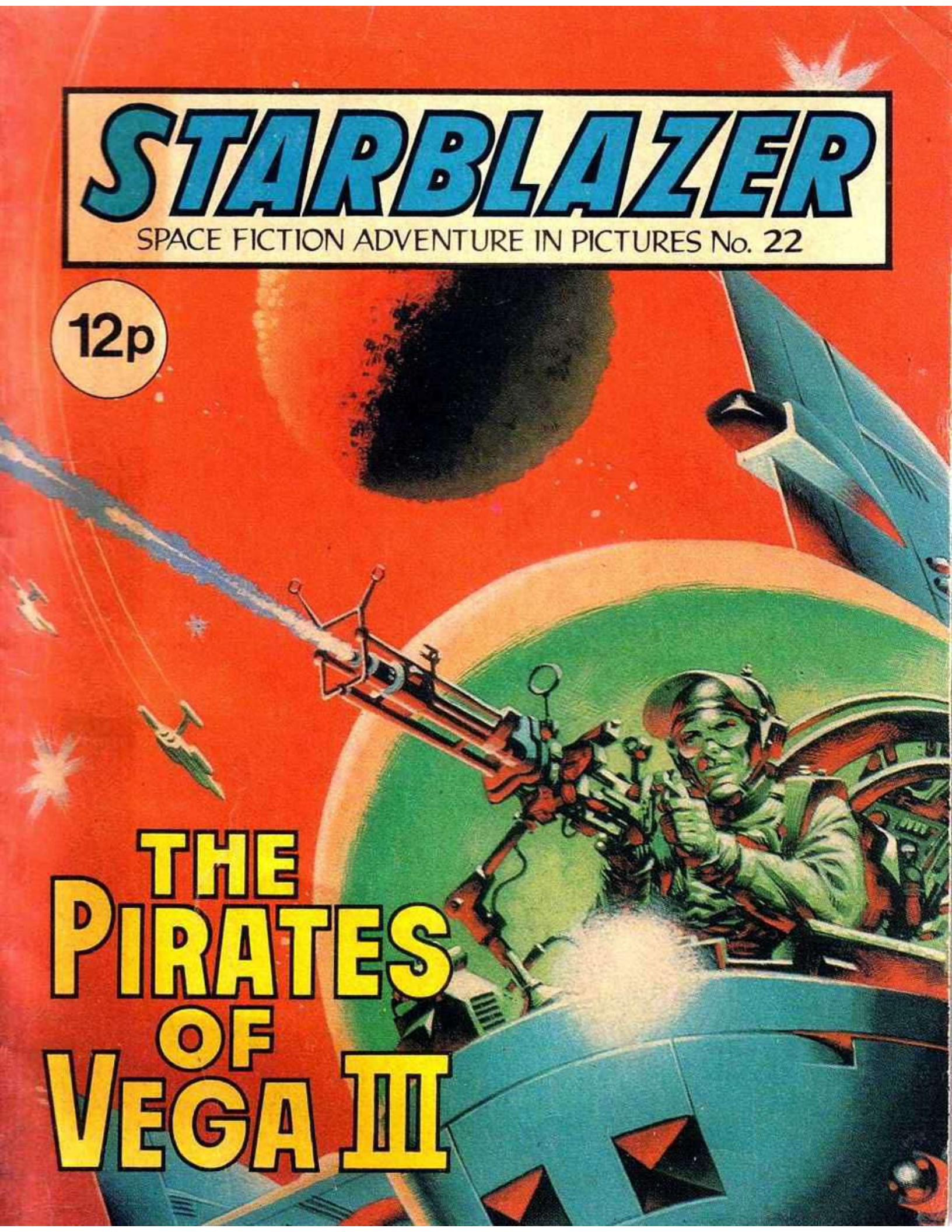


STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 22

12p

THE PIRATES OF VEGA III

A dynamic comic book illustration for the cover of 'Starblazer' No. 22. The scene is set in space against a vibrant red background. In the foreground, a green-skinned pilot with a determined expression is shown from the chest up, wearing a flight helmet and a green suit. He is operating a complex, multi-barreled weapon mounted on a blue and red mechanical structure. A bright white muzzle flash is visible at the bottom of the weapon. In the background, a large, green, spherical planet with a yellow horizon line dominates the center. To the left, a blue streak of light, possibly a comet or a fast-moving ship, cuts across the sky. Several small, white, V-shaped spacecraft are scattered in the distance. A large, dark, irregularly shaped object, resembling a nebula or a large asteroid, is positioned in the upper left. The overall style is classic comic book art with bold colors and dramatic lighting.

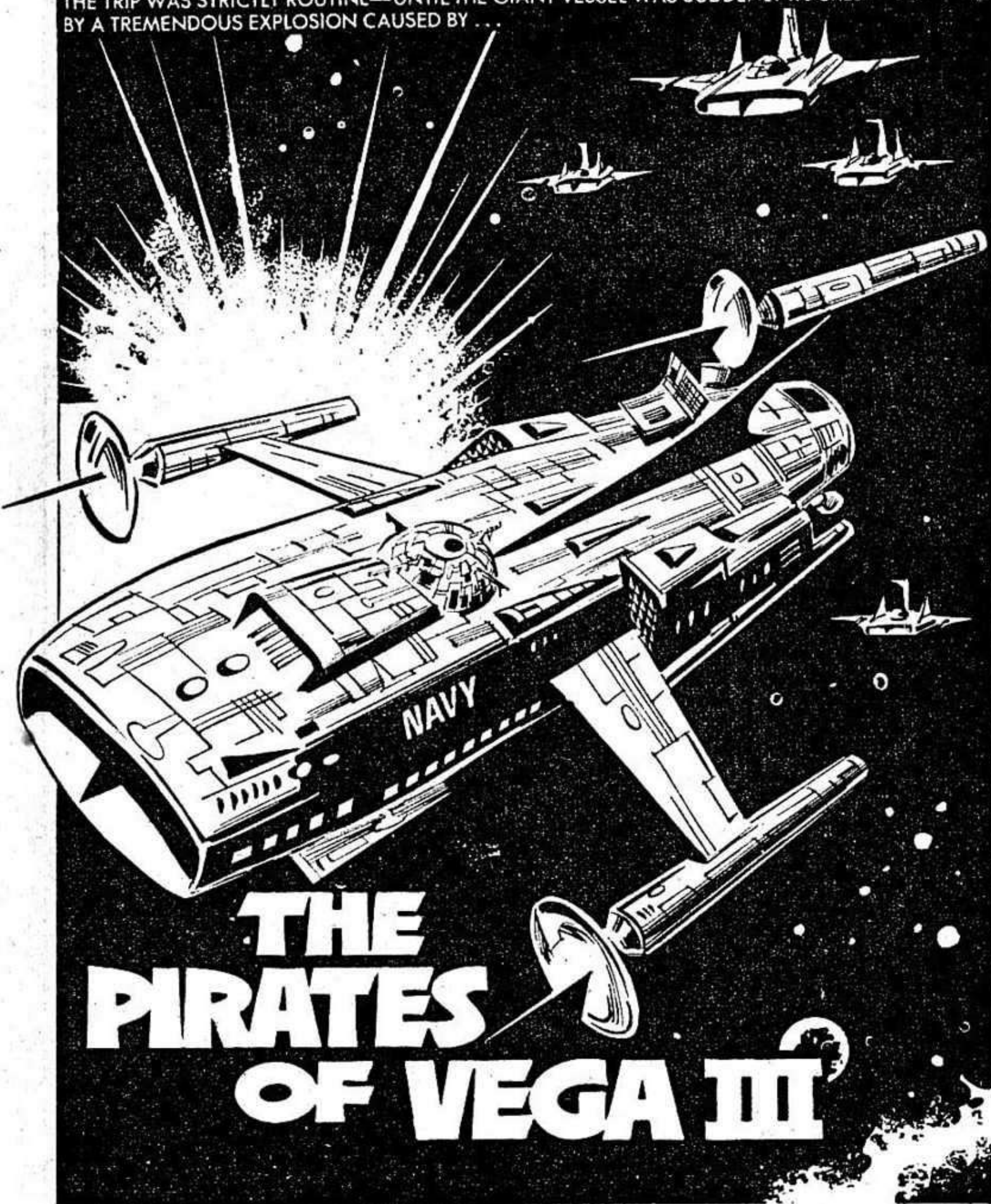
STARBLAZER



MAN
WASN'T ALONE IN
THE UNIVERSE, AND SOME
OF HIS NEIGHBOURS WERE LESS
THAN FRIENDLY. BECAUSE OF THIS
CONSTANT THREAT OF ALIEN AGGRESSION,
TRAFFIC BETWEEN EARTH AND THE
FAR-FLUNG OUTPOSTS OF HER EMPIRE
ALWAYS TRAVELLED WITH A SPACE NAVY
ESCORT. THE FREIGHTER "MONTANA"
WAS NO EXCEPTION. SHE WAS THREE
DAYS OUT FROM EARTH ON A SUPPLY
RUN TO JUPITER WHEN SHE MET
THE PIRATES OF
VEGA III.

Scanned by Zeg

THE TRIP WAS STRICTLY ROUTINE—UNTIL THE GIANT VESSEL WAS SUDDENLY ROCKED BY A TREMENDOUS EXPLOSION CAUSED BY ...



THE PIRATES OF VEGA III

THE CREW OF THE 'MONTANA' LISTENED IN STUNNED SILENCE AS THE SHIP'S COMMUNICATOR CRACKLED INTO LIFE.

ATTENTION MONTANA! ALL PERSONNEL TRANSFER IMMEDIATELY TO YOUR ESCORT VESSELS. FAILURE TO COMPLY WILL MEAN YOUR DEATHS. IT IS NOT YOUR LIVES WE WANT, MERELY YOUR CARGO.



MASTER OF THE MONTANA WAS CAPTAIN ANTON PAVIAN—A MAN ACUSTOMED TO GIVING ORDERS, NOT TAKING THEM.

WHO D'YOU THINK YOU ARE ANYWAY?

I COMMAND THE VESSEL, 'DARK SUN,' AND I AM KNOWN AS CAPTAIN BLOOD.

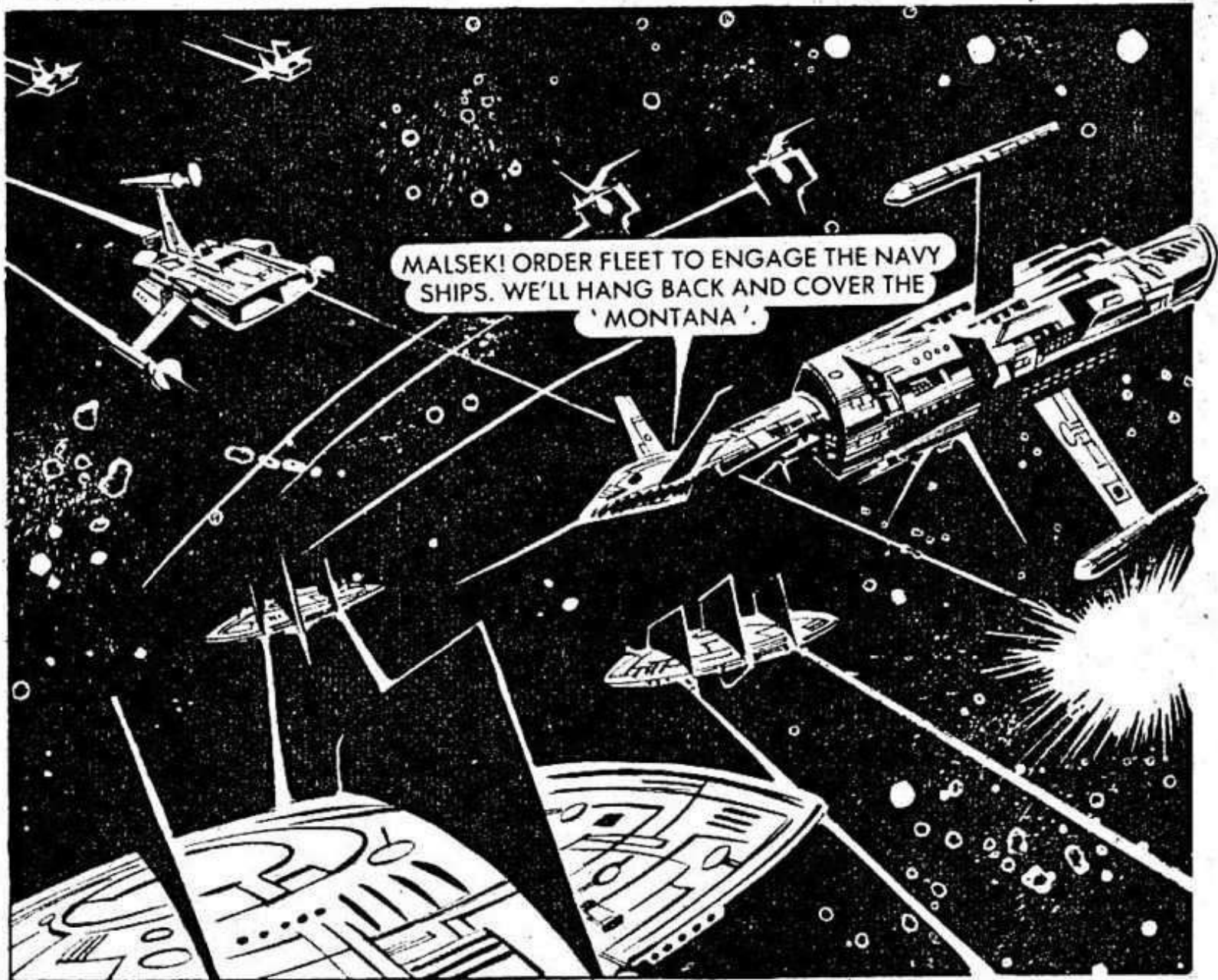




ABOARD THE 'DARK SUN' THE MOVEMENTS OF THE 'MONTANA' WERE OBSERVED.

THE MAN'S A FOOL. ALL I WANT IS HIS CARGO. HE MUST KNOW HE CAN NEVER BEAT US IN A FIGHT, EH, MALSEK?

NO INDEED, CAPTAIN BLOOD, SIR. WHAT CARGO IS WORTH THE LOSS OF ONE'S LIFE?



MALSEK! ORDER FLEET TO ENGAGE THE NAVY SHIPS. WE'LL HANG BACK AND COVER THE 'MONTANA'.

THE NAVY SHIPS WERE NO MATCH FOR THE
HEAVILY ARMED PIRATE VESSELS. . .



... ALTHOUGH THEY DID SCORE OCCASIONAL HITS.



WAHOO!... GOT 'IM.

ESCORT LEADER TO MONTANA... DISENGAGE
IMMEDIATELY. SURRENDER YOUR CARGO. THAT IS AN
ORDER!

AS THE BATTLE PROGRESSED IT BECAME CLEAR WHAT THE OUTCOME
WOULD BE—TOTAL VICTORY FOR THE PIRATES. DESPERATELY THE ESCORT
LEADER ATTEMPTED TO SALVAGE THE SITUATION.

BUT ANTON PAVIAN WAS TOO BUSY WITH THE 'DARK SUN' TO HEED THAT ORDER.

GET A FIX ON HIM. ONE GOOD SHOT IS ALL I NEED TO BLOW THE RAT TO PIECES.

I CAN'T. HE'S STAYING JUST BEYOND OUR RANGE. HE'S TOYING WITH US!

ONLY ONE ESCORT SHIP REMAINED—
'STAR RIDER'.

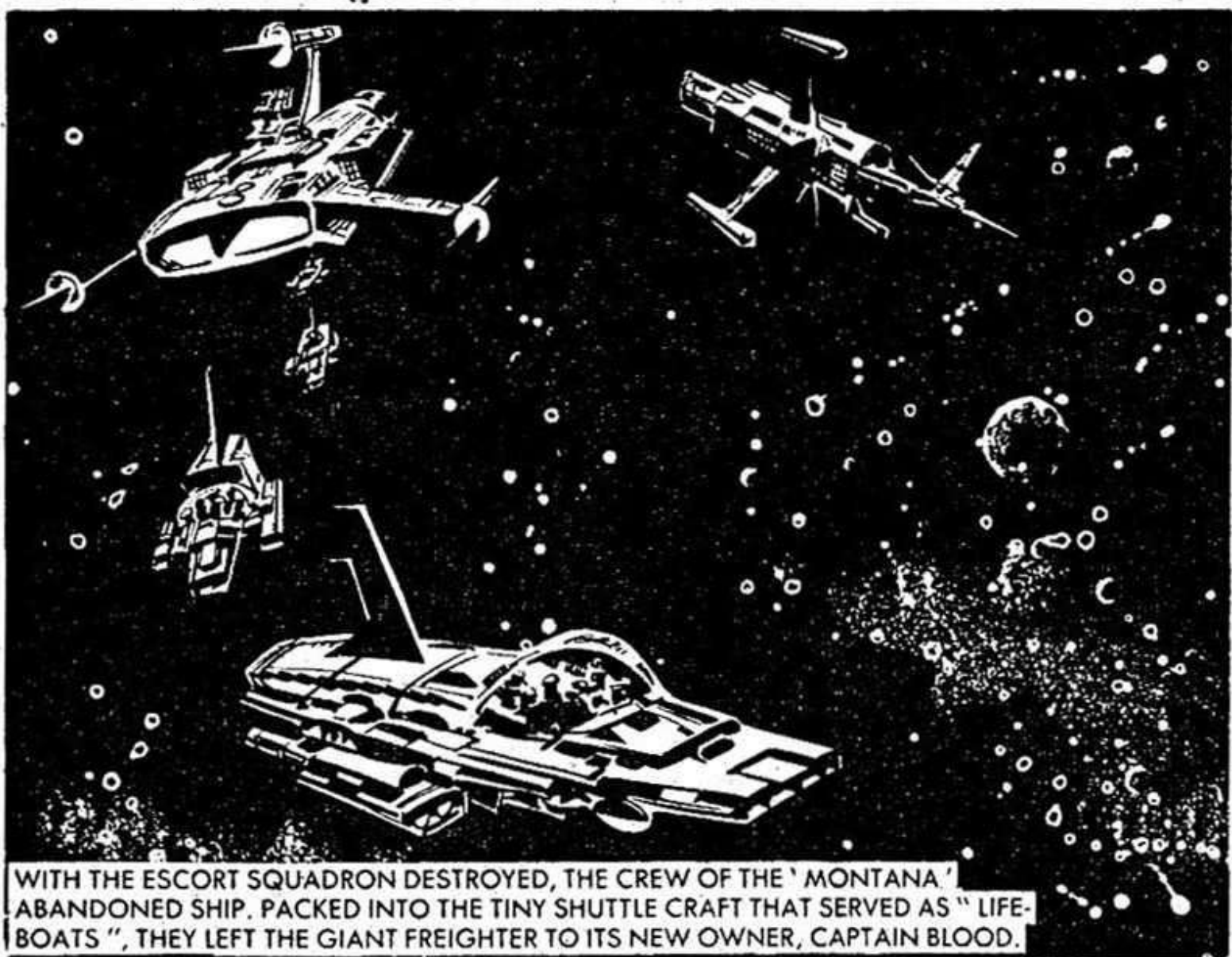
WELL, MEN, WE'RE ON OUR OWN. LOOKS LIKE PAVIAN'S INTENT ON COMMITTING SUICIDE. DO WE GIVE IN TO THESE DEVILS, OR DO WE GO OUT FIGHTING?

WE FIGHT!

'STAR RIDER' WARPED TOWARDS THE ENEMY. SHIELDS DOWN AND GUNS FIRING.



BEFORE THE PIRATE SHIPS COULD COME WITHIN RANGE OF THE 'STAR RIDER'S' WEAPONS, THE ENTIRE FLEET FIRED ON THE EARTH VESSEL SIMULTANEOUSLY.



WITH THE ESCORT SQUADRON DESTROYED, THE CREW OF THE 'MONTANA' ABANDONED SHIP. PACKED INTO THE TINY SHUTTLE CRAFT THAT SERVED AS "LIFE-BOATS", THEY LEFT THE GIANT FREIGHTER TO ITS NEW OWNER, CAPTAIN BLOOD.

CAPTAIN PAVIAN WAS DETERMINED THAT HIS CARGO WOULD NOT FALL INTO OTHER HANDS AS BLOOD AND MALSEK BEAMED ABOARD ...

AUTO-DESTRUCT

HOLD IT, PAVIAN!

ALL THE CREW ARE SAFELY AWAY. DESTRUCT TIMER SET TO ZERO SECONDS ... I JUST HAVE TO PRESS THE BUTTON ...

MALSEK FIRED HIS LASER.

SORRY, CAPTAIN. BUT IF YOU'D PUSHED THAT BUTTON WE'D ALL HAVE GONE UP.

HE'S ONLY STUNNED. GET MEN TO PUT HIM IN A LIFE CAPSULE ... SEND IT AFTER THE LIFEBOATS.

BLOOD AND MALSEK HEADED FOR THE 'MONTANA'S' CARGO HOLDS.

NO WONDER PAVIAN WAS SO ANXIOUS TO DESTROY HIS SHIP. HE DIDN'T WANT ANYONE TO FIND THIS.

YES! BUT WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?

TWO WEEKS AFTER THE MONTANA ATTACK, ON EARTH A SLEEK BLACK SKIMMER PULLED UP IN FRONT OF THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE UNITED WORLD COUNCIL.

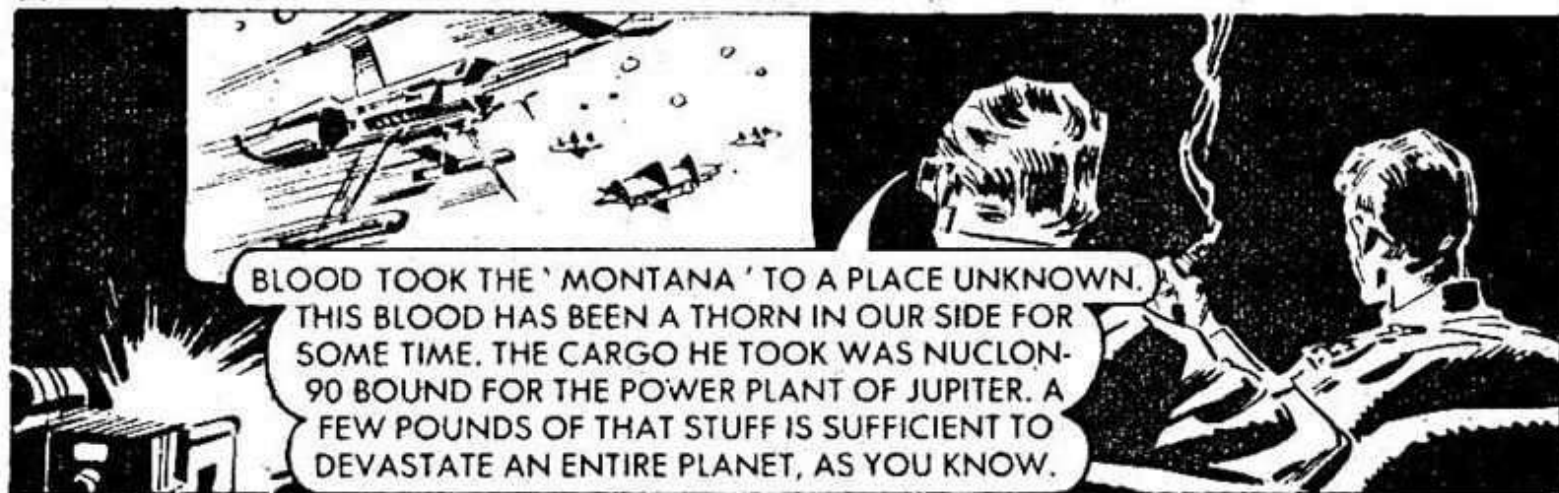


CAPTAIN AXEL BENTON ENTERED THE WORLD COUNCIL H.Q. AFTER A NUMBER OF ELABORATE SECURITY CHECKS, HE FOUND HIMSELF FACE-TO-FACE WITH PRESIDENT GROSSMAN—THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE WORLD.





THIS WAS TAKEN BY A MEMBER OF
THE 'MONTANA'S' CREW FROM A LIFERAFT.



EIGHT YEARS PREVIOUSLY, AXEL HAD BEEN A YOUNG FIRST OFFICER
ABOARD THE SPACE NAVY CRUISER 'DAUNTLESS'.

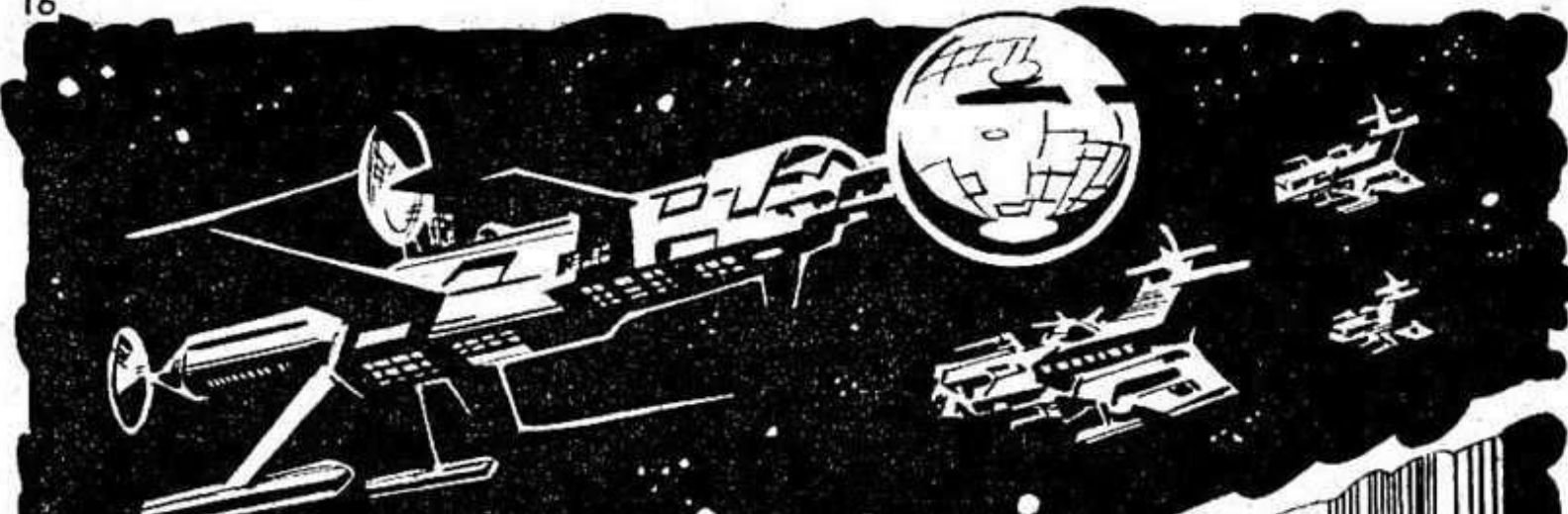
CAPTAIN... SENSORS INDICATE CRAFT
APPROACHING US AT HIGH SPEED.

TRY FOR A VISUAL TRACE, BENTON.
MAINTAIN SHIELDS AT FULL
STRENGTH.

IT'S OF ALIEN DESIGN. HARD TO TELL
IF IT'S FRIENDLY OR NOT. MAYBE THE
COMPUTER CAN HELP.


COMPUTER HAS IDENTIFIED CRAFT AS
SORION! WARLIKE RACE... IT'S
RUMOURED THAT THEY'VE GOT THEIR
MINDS SET ON TOTAL GALACTIC
CONQUEST.

RED ALERT! INFORM THE WORLD COUNCIL,
MISTER BENTON. WE'VE GOT A FIGHT ON
OUR HANDS.




AN EARLY CASUALTY OF THE BATTLE WAS THE CAPTAIN OF THE 'DAUNTLESS'. AXEL ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE SHIP, BUT A MESSAGE FROM EARTH ORDERED HIM TO PREPARE FOR A TELEPORT.

IT WAS PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD COUNCIL—AUGUSTUS GROSSMAN.




PRESIDENT GROSSMAN...
W-WELCOME ABOARD, SIR.
ACTING COMMANDER BENTON
AT YOUR SERVICE.



ANY MOMENT NOW, THE
SORION WARLORD IS
BEAMING ABOARD. CLEAR THE
BRIDGE—WE'RE GOING TO
TALK.


THE TALKING WENT ON FOR A LONG TIME,
BUT AT LAST GROSSMAN APPEARED.



TERMS HAVE BEEN AGREED. THERE
WILL BE NO WAR.

THAT MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A
DEAL YOU MADE WITH THEM, SIR.

I DON'T THINK YOU NEED BOTHER
YOURSELF ABOUT THAT, DO YOU
CAPTAIN BENTON?



THERE'S SOMETHING FISHY,
PROMOTION TO CAPTAIN IS A
BRIBE TO KEEP MY MOUTH
SHUT AND NOT ASK ANY
AWKWARD QUESTIONS.

THE INTERVIEW ENDED.

REMEMBER, BENTON, NO-ONE MUST KNOW ANYTHING OF THIS. YOU UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THAT, DON'T YOU?

YES, SIR. I TOOK THE OATH OF SECRECY WHEN I JOINED THE SPACE NAVY.

AXEL RETURNED TO HIS QUARTERS AND SUMMONED HIS BATMAN, THERISH.

PACK A FEW THINGS, THERISH. WE'RE GOING ON A LITTLE TRIP. I'M AFRAID I CAN'T TELL YOU TOO MUCH ABOUT IT. STRICTLY HUSH-HUSH, Y'KNOW.

VERY GOOD, SIR.

AXEL'S STAR-CRUISER PULLED FREE OF EARTH'S GRAVITY AND HEADED INTO DEEP SPACE.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR A
PIRATE NAMED CAPTAIN
BLOOD, THERISH. WE'LL
CHECK OUT THE
MARTIAN UNDERWORLD
FIRST.

INDEED, SIR.



BEFORE SETTING THE AUTO-PILOT FOR MARS, AXEL DOCKED AT AN
ORBITAL CUSTOMS STATION. ONE OF MANY DRIFTING HIGH ABOVE THE
EARTH.

I'VE GOT A-1 SECURITY CLEARANCE. I JUST
DROPPED BY TO SEE IF MY BROTHER, EMIR, IS
AROUND.

CHIEF CUSTOMS OFFICER BENTON IS AWAY TODAY I'M
AFRAID, SIR. OFF ON A ROUTINE CHECK OF ONE OF THE
OTHER STATIONS. HE COULD BE ANYWHERE.



AXEL'S STARCruiser SPED ON TO MARS. CALLISTO, THE ONLY CITY ON MARS, WAS PROTECTED FROM THE POISONOUS ATMOSPHERE BY A DOME.

I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG THIS'LL TAKE, THERISH. STAY WITH THE CRUISER FOR THE TIME BEING.

VERY GOOD, SIR.










THE SONIC SABRE WAS A WEAPON OF AXEL'S OWN DESIGN. IT HAD A GENERATOR BUILT INTO ITS HANDLE WHICH PRODUCED A CONTROLLED AREA OF SONIC VIBRATION. IT COULD SLICE THROUGH ANY KNOWN MATERIAL.




THE UNDERWORLD SCUM WHO GATHERED ON MARS WERE NOT EASILY FRIGHTENED.

THEY'RE DETERMINED TO FIGHT.
MAKE FOR THE DOOR, THERISH. I'LL
BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU.



WE'RE GOING TO
RIP YOU TO PIECES!



KEEP GOING, THERISH!



THE SONIC SWORD CUT A HOLE IN THE FLOOR AND THE ALIENS FELL INTO ONE OF THE STINKING CANALS OF MARS.

IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR HANDS, TALK QUICKLY. WHERE DO I FIND BLOOD?



BY THE TIME AXEL ARRIVED THERISH HAD THE ENGINES WARMED UP AND READY FOR LIFT OFF.



SET AUTO PILOT FOR SECTOR 73, CRAB NEBULA, THERISH, AND ... WHAT'S THAT?

YOUR LUNCH SIR. YOU REALLY OUGHT TO EAT SOMETHING YOU KNOW. ALL THIS EXCITEMENT ON AN EMPTY STOMACH ...

THE TWO MEN SETTLED DOWN FOR THE TRIP TO THE AREA KNOWN AS THE CRAB NEBULA.



I CAN'T HELP FEELING THAT THERE'S SOMETHING NOT QUITE RIGHT ABOUT THIS WHOLE AFFAIR. GROSSMAN WORRIES ME! HE'S BEEN ACTING VERY STRANGELY OVER THIS SORION BUSINESS. HE NEVER REVEALED THE SETTLEMENT TERMS.



TWO DAYS OUT FROM MARS, AXEL WAS RUNNING A CHECK ON A FAULTY CIRCUIT.

SIR! THERE ARE SHIPS OFF THE PORT SIDE AND THEY APPEAR TO BE APPROACHING US. I FEEL THAT THEIR INTENTIONS ARE NOT FRIENDLY...

WE'RE NOT FAR FROM SECTOR 73... THEY MUST BE PIRATES! ACTION STATIONS.



AXEL THREW HIS SHIP INTO A SPIN.



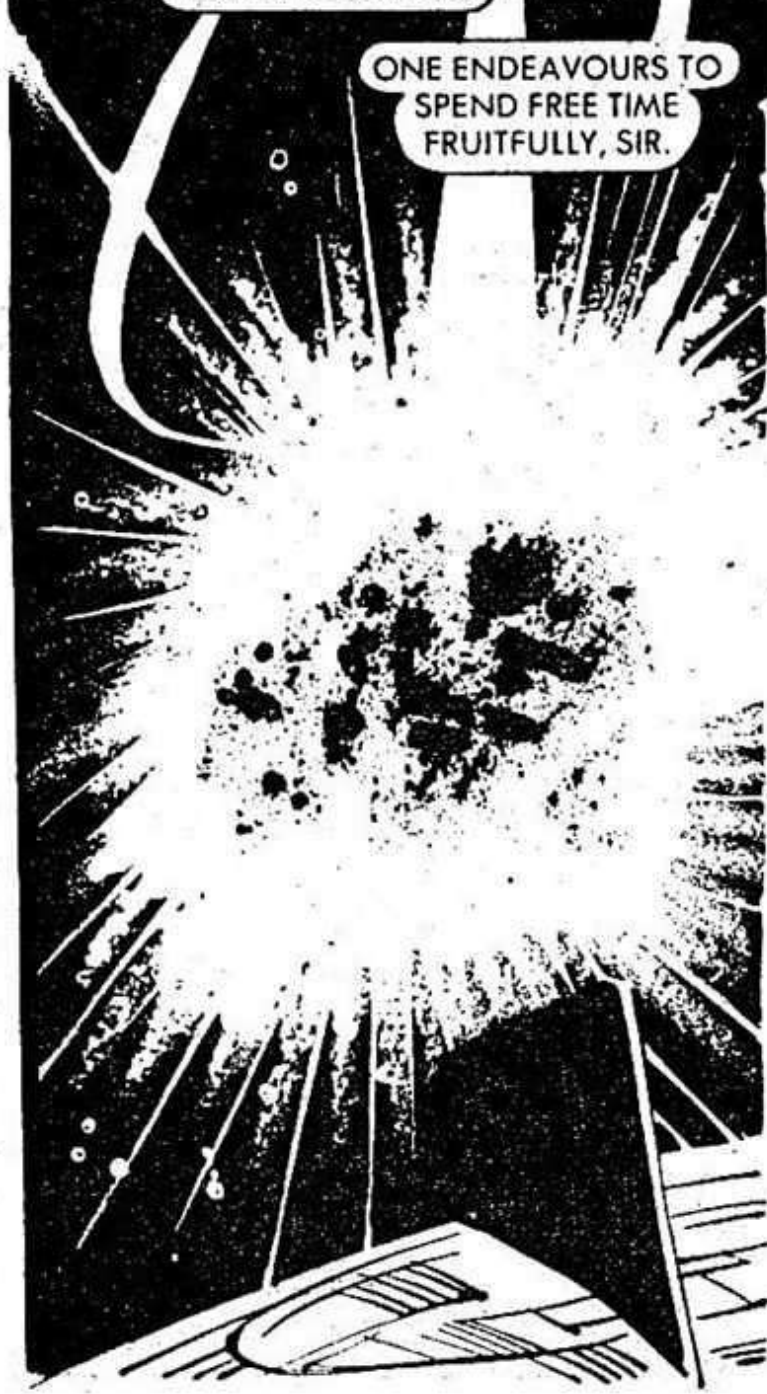
STAND BY ON THE LASER CANNON, THERISH. IT'LL HAVE TO BE FIRED MANUALLY—THE CIRCUIT'S STILL FAULTY.



THE SCATTERBEAM WAS A DESTRUCTIVE LASER RAY THAT COULD HIT MORE THAN ONE TARGET.

THERISH, YOU'VE BEEN PRACTISING.
YOU SLY OLD DOG.

ONE ENDEAVOURS TO
SPEND FREE TIME
FRUITFULLY, SIR.



ABOARD THE PIRATE SHIPS, THERE WAS CONSTERNATION.

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU, IDIOT?
GET THAT SHIP IN YOUR SIGHTS.

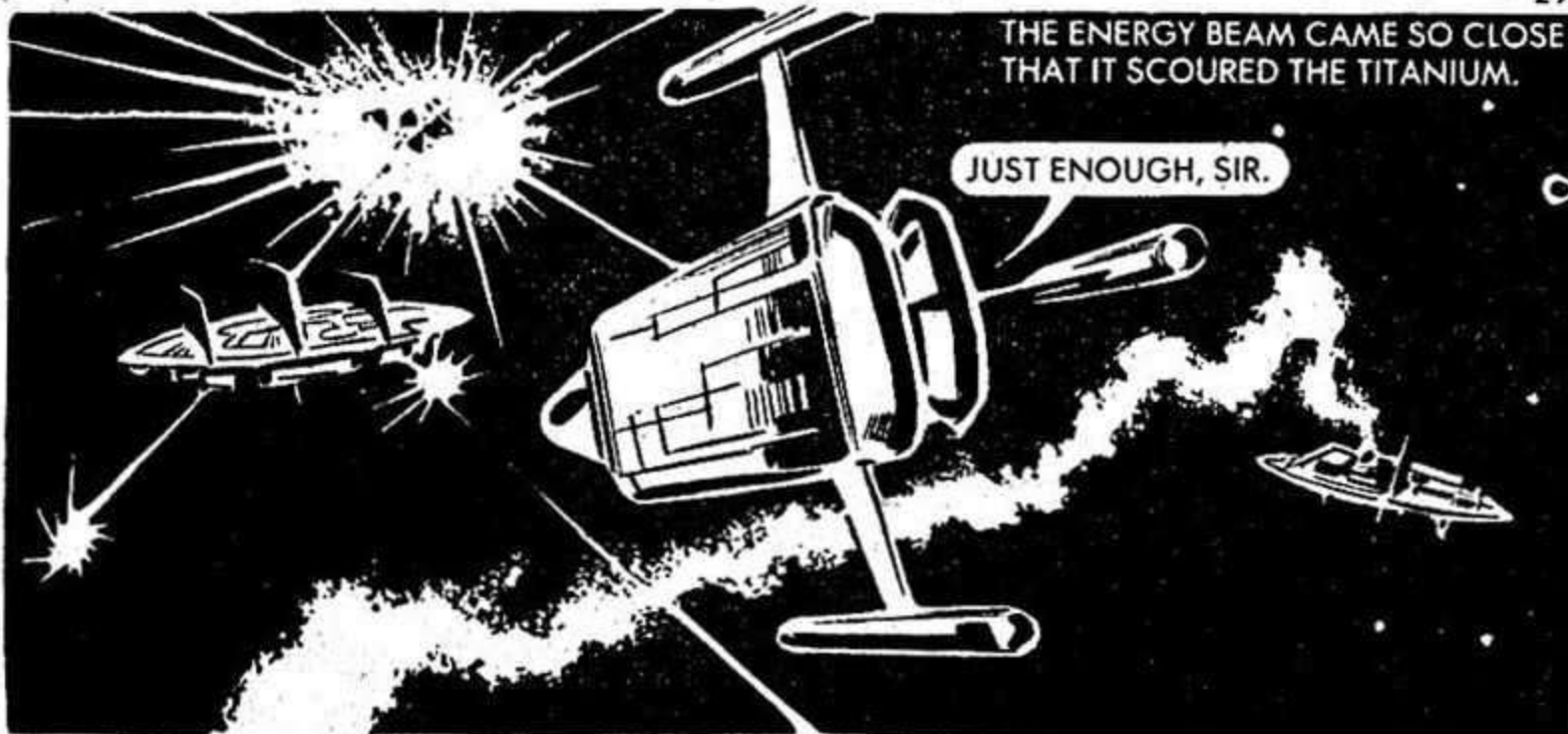
YOU TELL HIM TO KEEP STILL . . . HE'S TOO
MANOEVRABLE FOR US.

AXEL'S CONCENTRATION WAS INTENSE.

SIR, I THINK A ROLL
TO THE RIGHT IS NEEDED.

THE ENERGY BEAM CAME SO CLOSE THAT IT SCOURED THE TITANIUM.

JUST ENOUGH, SIR.



THAT'S THE END OF THEM, THERISH.

YES, SIR. BUT I FEAR THAT CAPTAIN BLOOD MUST NOW BE AWARE OF OUR PRESENCE IN THIS SECTOR.



1-72 SPACIALS AFTER THEIR BRUSH WITH THE PIRATES.

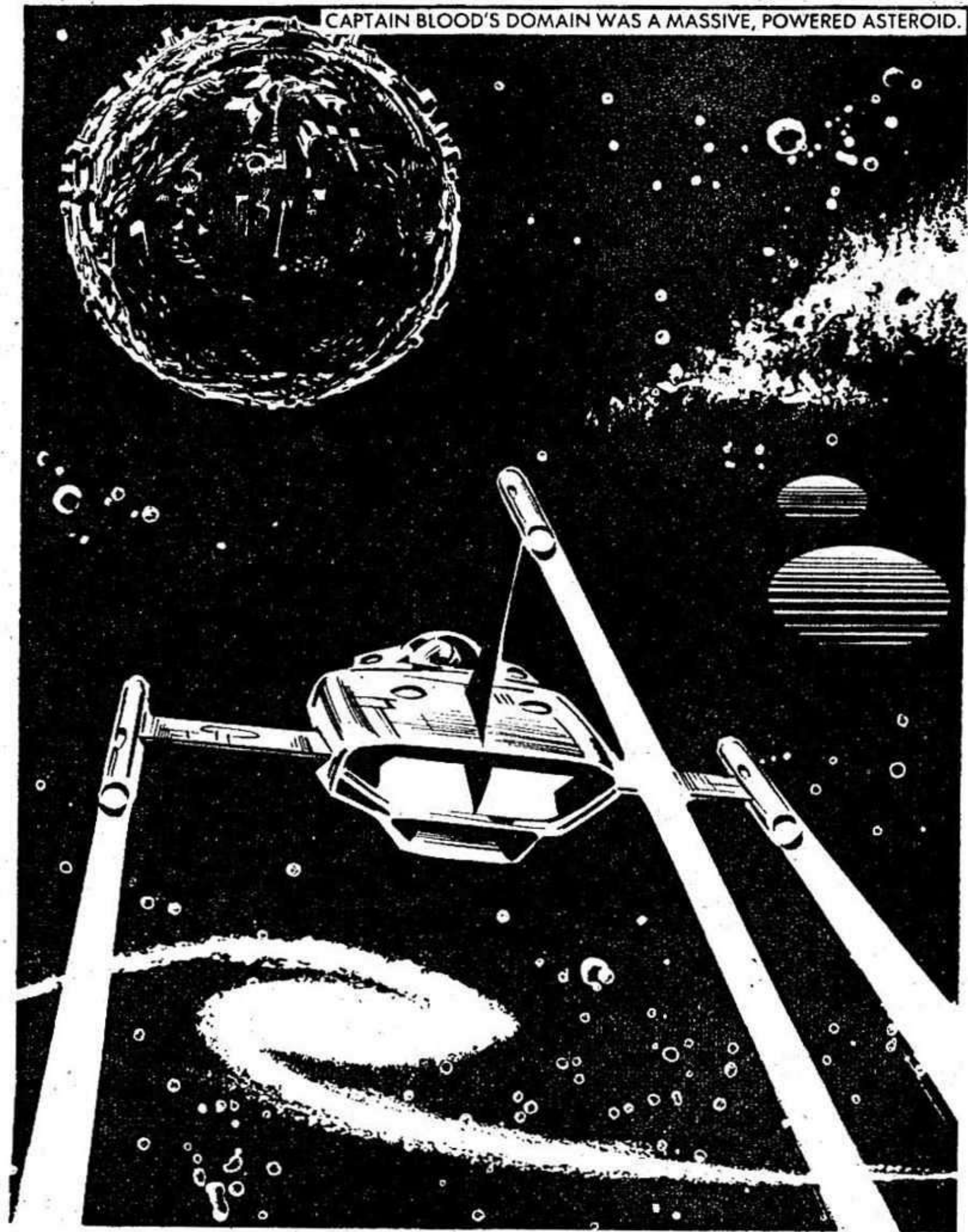
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THERE IT IS. CAPTAIN BLOOD'S DOMAIN. A FEW MORE HOURS AND WE'LL BE RIGHT ON TOP OF IT.

ACCORDING TO THE SENSORS IT IS AN ASTEROID OF TRULY REMARKABLE SIZE.



CAPTAIN BLOOD'S DOMAIN WAS A MASSIVE, POWERED ASTEROID.



AXEL RAN A FEW SWIFT CHECKS.

WHAT A SIZE! IT MUST HAVE TAKEN A FAR
SUPERIOR TECHNOLOGY TO OURS TO
BUILD THAT.



THE SENSORS INDICATE THAT IT
HAS NO DEFENSIVE SHIELDS.
WE'RE NOT EVEN BEING PROBED.
OUR CAPTAIN BLOOD MUST BE
VERY SURE OF HIMSELF.



IT WOULD SEEM THAT CAUTION IS
INDICATED, SIR.



AXEL PUT THE CRAFT DOWN AND THEN
SEARCHED FOR AN ENTRANCE.

DOWN! IT'S A
PLASMA RAY.



DEEP INSIDE THE ASTEROID CAPTAIN BLOOD
WAS WATCHING.



GET A CLOSE UP ON THE TALL ONE.



WE'VE GOT TO TAKE A DESPERATE
CHANCE. ARE YOU WITH ME?

THAT CRATER OFF TO THE RIGHT APPEARS
TO BE THE ENTRANCE TO THE INTERIOR OF
THIS PIECE OF ROCK.

AXEL AND THERISH SPIRTED, DODGING LASER
TRAPS AS THEY RAN.





WE'LL FIND OUT WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS DOOR, NOW.

CAPTAIN BLOOD WAS ANGRY.

WHERE ARE THEY MALSEK?



THEY'RE JUST INSIDE THE ENTRANCE TO TUNNEL 12, CAPTAIN. WE'LL PICK THEM UP AGAIN AT THE BASE OF THE TUNNEL.




I'LL BE IN MY QUARTERS—DON'T DISTURB ME UNLESS IT'S TO ANNOUNCE THAT YOU'VE DEALT WITH OUR UNINVITED GUESTS.

MALSEK PASSED BLOOD'S
ORDER TO THE
DUTY CREW.


I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT BLOOD IS SO
DISORGANISED, THERISH. NOT A SINGLE
GUARD IN SIGHT.





A VID-CAMERA: THEY'RE
MONITORING OUR EVERY MOVE.
WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT!

HERE THEY
COME, SIR!




I'M SURE WE COULD
TAKE THEM ON, SIR.

YES, BUT NOT FACE-TO-FACE. WE NEED
AN EDGE ON THEM. IN HERE, QUICK!

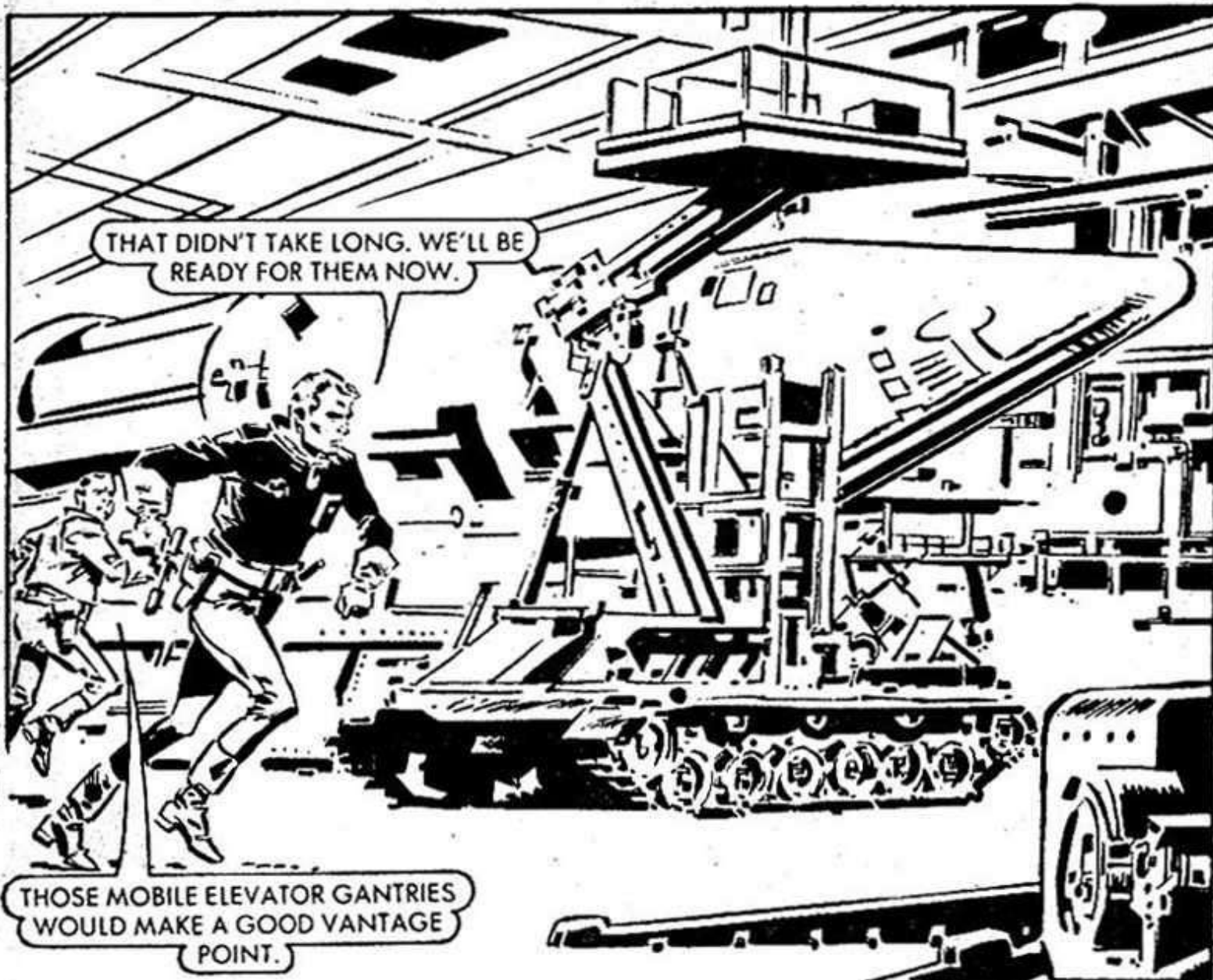
AXEL PUSHED THERISH INTO A LARGE STORE ROOM.

ACTIVATING THE SONIC SABRE, AXEL PLUNGED IT INTO A BULKHEAD.

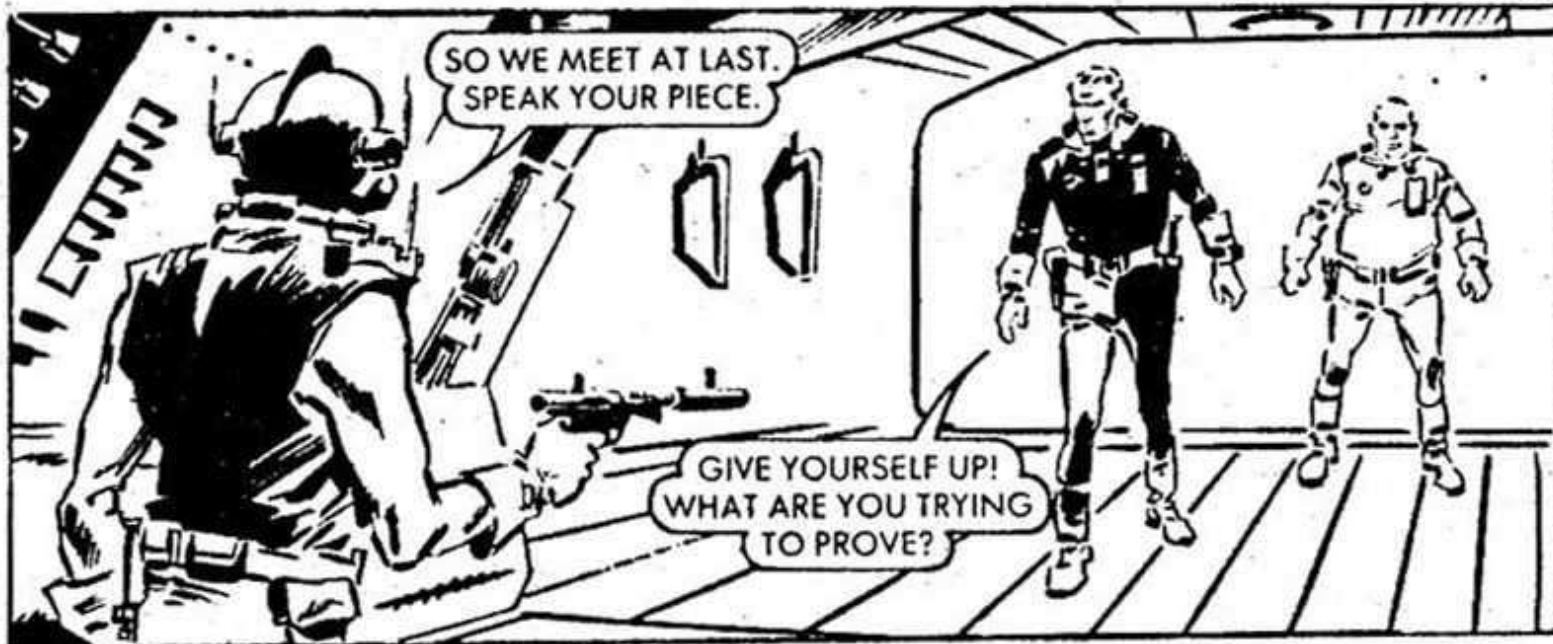


WHAT WAS THE POINT OF
LOCKING THE DOOR, SIR?

I'M HOPING THOSE GUARDS WILL THINK
WE'RE TRAPPED IN HERE. IT'LL TAKE A FEW
MINUTES TO GET AROUND TO
CHECKING—BY THEN I SHOULD HAVE
CUT A PATH OUT OF HERE.









AXEL MOVED IN CLOSE TO HIS ADVERSARY AND WITH A SUDDEN FLICK OF THE WRIST ALMOST DISARMED HIM.



YOU TALK A GOOD FIGHT, BLOOD, BUT THAT'S ALL YOU ARE—TALK!

AXEL'S NEXT ATTACK DID DISARM CAPTAIN BLOOD.

GO ON... FINISH IT OFF.

I'M NOT A COLD-BLOODED KILLER. I WANT SOME INFORMATION, THAT'S ALL. BUT FIRST I THINK WE OUGHT TO HAVE A LOOK AT WHO YOU REALLY ARE.

Y-YOU!!

YES... ME!

YES... ME... EMIR BENTON! YOUR KID BROTHER IS CAPTAIN BLOOD.



YOU WERE THE ATHLETE—THE FAVOURITE! I WAS THE STUDIOUS ONE. YOU ALWAYS GOT TO GO FLYING OR WHATEVER. I HAD TO STUDY. I GREW UP HATING YOU. NOBODY HAD ANY TIME FOR ME!

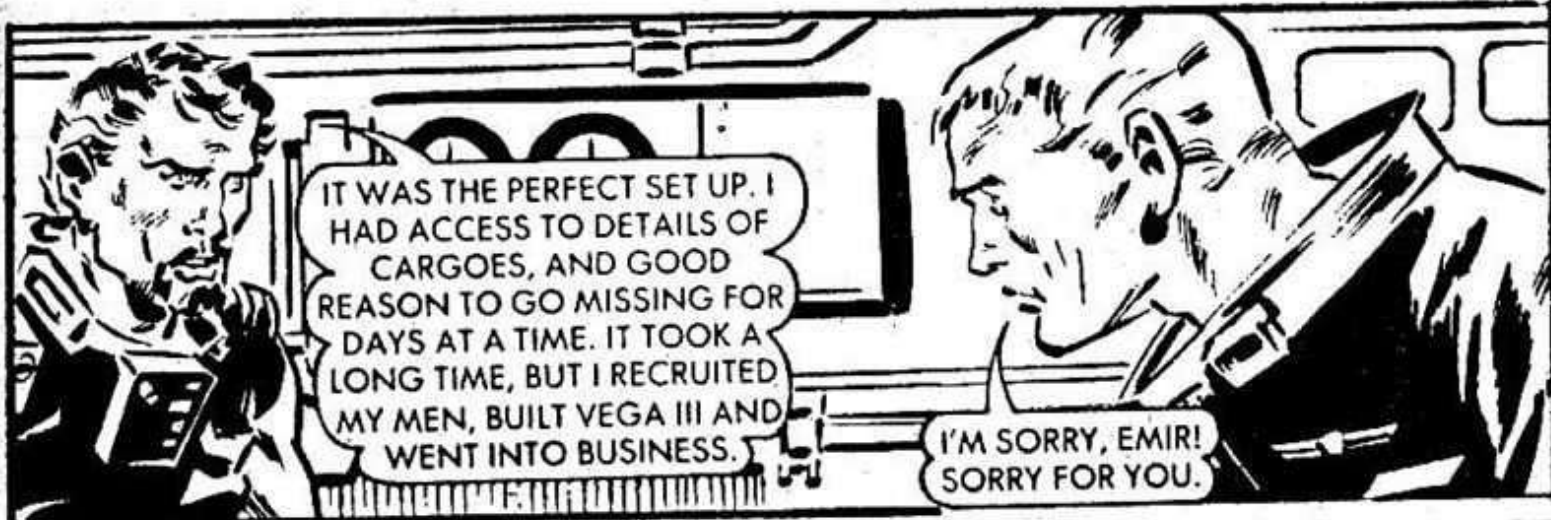
THAT IS NOT TRUE.



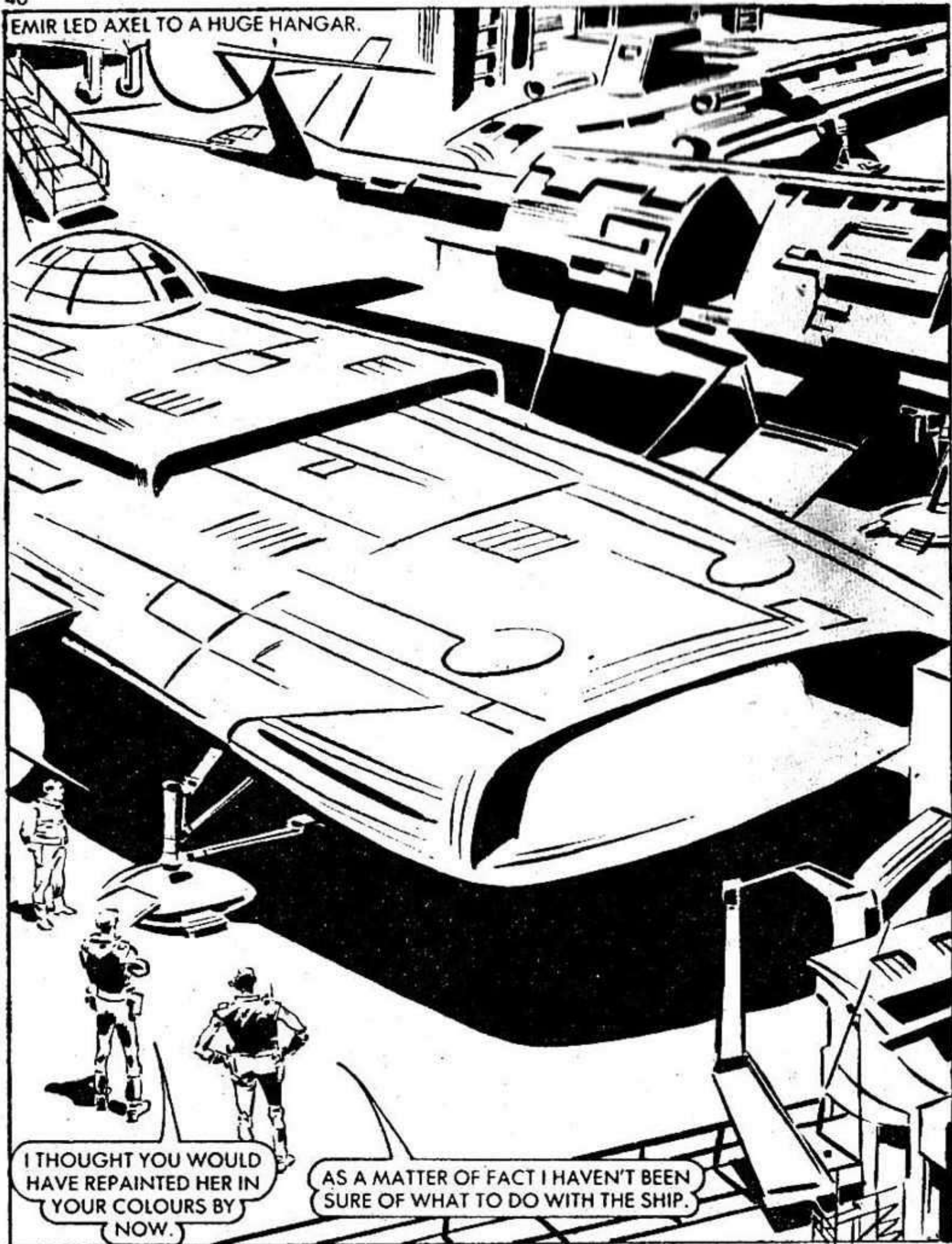
IT IS! I HAD TO WORK NIGHTS TO EARN ENOUGH TO PAY FOR MY OWN EDUCATION, WHILE YOU GAINED SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS. NOBODY HELPED ME.

THEN YOU GAINED A COMMISSION IN THE SPACE NAVY. FIRST OFFICER BENTON—EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE. AND ME? ... LEFT IN THE BACKGROUND AS USUAL. I TOOK A JOB IN THE CUSTOMS SERVICE TO TRY AND GET AS FAR AWAY FROM YOU AS POSSIBLE. I DESPISED YOU AND ALL THAT YOU STOOD FOR. AND THEN IT CAME TO ME—A WAY TO GET BACK AT ALL THOSE WHO IGNORED ME.



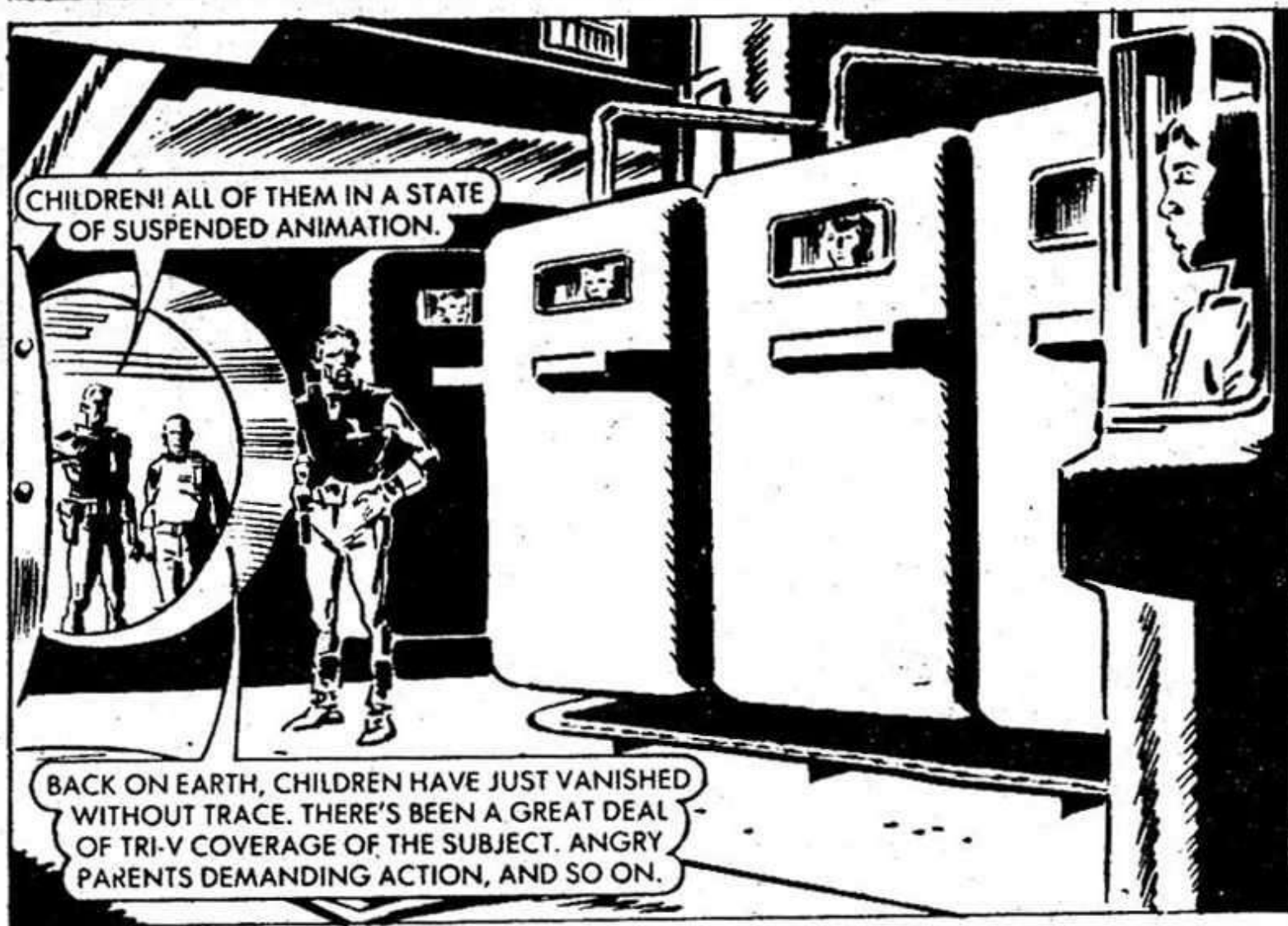


EMIR LED AXEL TO A HUGE HANGAR.



I THOUGHT YOU WOULD
HAVE REPAINTED HER IN
YOUR COLOURS BY
NOW.

AS A MATTER OF FACT I HAVEN'T BEEN
SURE OF WHAT TO DO WITH THE SHIP.



AXEL OUTLINED THE DETAILS OF THE SORION ATTEMPT AT CONQUEST OF THE EARTH AND GROSSMAN'S ROLE IN AVERTING IT.



HE MUST HAVE MADE A DEAL WITH THE SORIONS TO SUPPLY THEM WITH YOUNG SLAVES IN EXCHANGE FOR THEM LEAVING EARTH ALONE.

WHAT DO THE SORIONS WANT WITH THESE YOUNGSTERS?



CAPTAIN, THE MEN REPORT MISSION ACCOMPLISHED. THEY'RE RETURNING TO BASE.

OKAY, MALSEK.

EMIR ... YOU HATE THIS SITUATION AS MUCH AS I DO! I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH SUPPORT GROSSMAN HAS ON EARTH. SOME OF THE WORLD COUNCIL MUST BE IN ON THIS. WHAT I NEED IS A STRONG FLEET TO SMASH THIS TRADE.



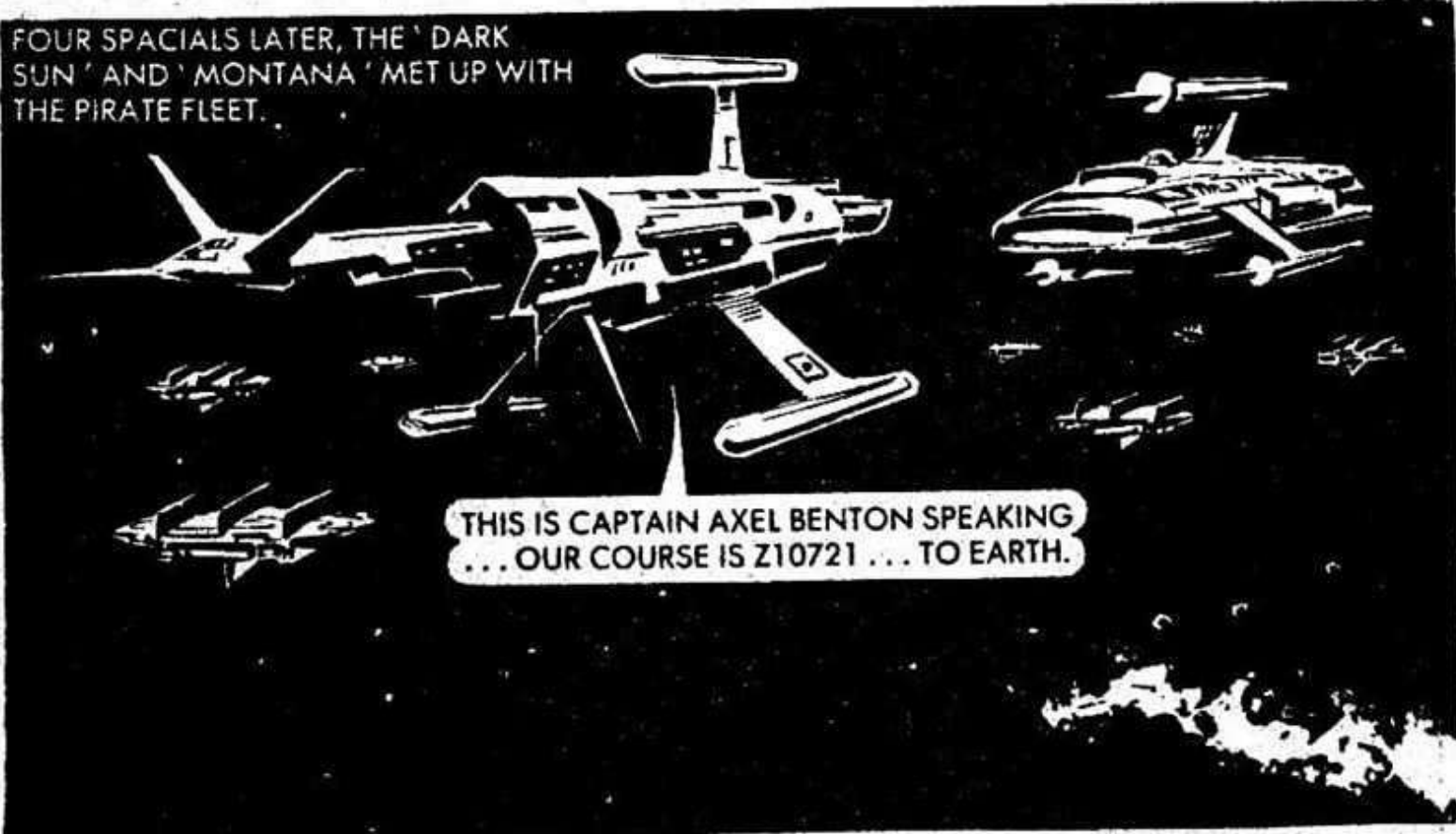
AND YOU WANT TO BORROW MY FLEET. I AGREE THAT GROSSMAN'S A SKUNK. IN FACT I'VE NEVER LIKED HIM. I'D LIKE TO HELP YOU, AXEL, BUT WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

WE CAN CUT OFF THE SUPPLY, BUT WE STILL HAVE TO KILL THE DEMAND. WE'LL ATTACK THE SORIONS.



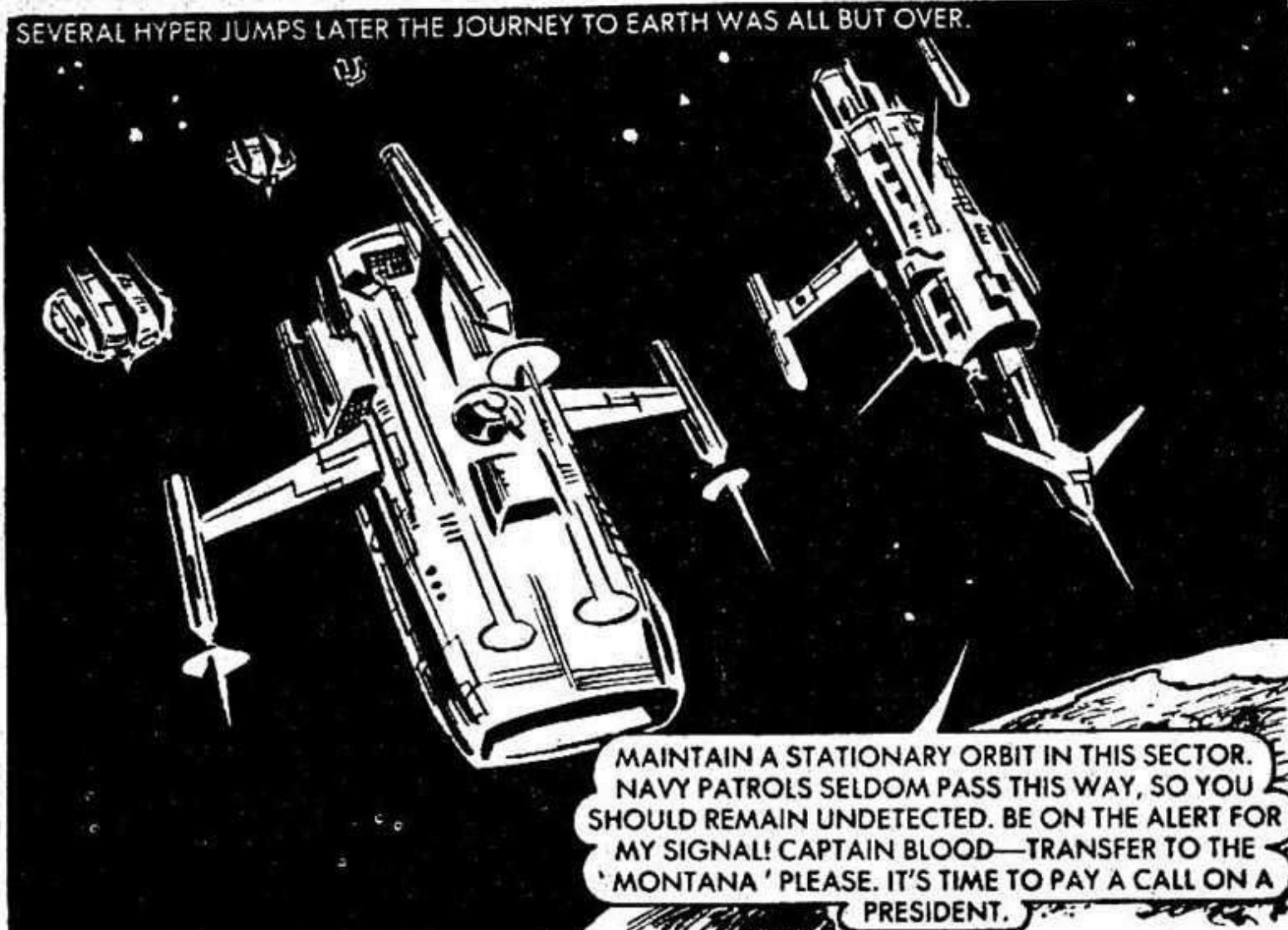
ATTACK THE SORIONS! I'D HAVE RIGHTS TO PLUNDER ON SORION IF I THROW IN WITH YOU. OKAY, LET'S GO!

FOUR SPACIALS LATER, THE 'DARK SUN' AND 'MONTANA' MET UP WITH THE PIRATE FLEET.



THIS IS CAPTAIN AXEL BENTON SPEAKING
... OUR COURSE IS Z10721 ... TO EARTH.

SEVERAL HYPER JUMPS LATER THE JOURNEY TO EARTH WAS ALL BUT OVER.

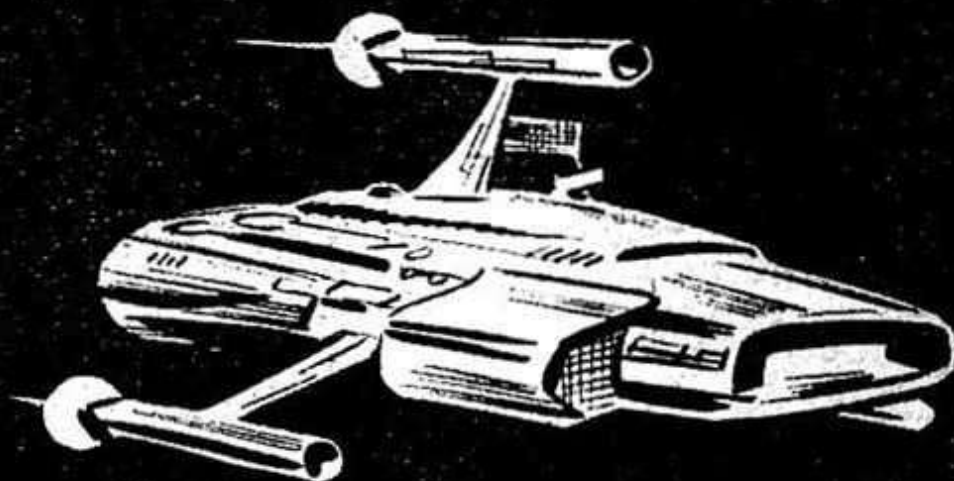


MAINTAIN A STATIONARY ORBIT IN THIS SECTOR.
NAVY PATROLS SELDOM PASS THIS WAY, SO YOU
SHOULD REMAIN UNDETECTED. BE ON THE ALERT FOR
MY SIGNAL! CAPTAIN BLOOD—TRANSFER TO THE
'MONTANA' PLEASE. IT'S TIME TO PAY A CALL ON A
PRESIDENT.

THE 'MONTANA' CONTINUED THE JOURNEY INTO EARTHSPACE ALONE.

IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND
STATE YOUR BUSINESS.

THIS IS THE 'MONTANA'. CAPTAIN AXEL
BENTON COMMANDING. I HAVE SOMETHING
ABOARD FOR THE PERSONAL ATTENTION OF
PRESIDENT GROSSMAN.

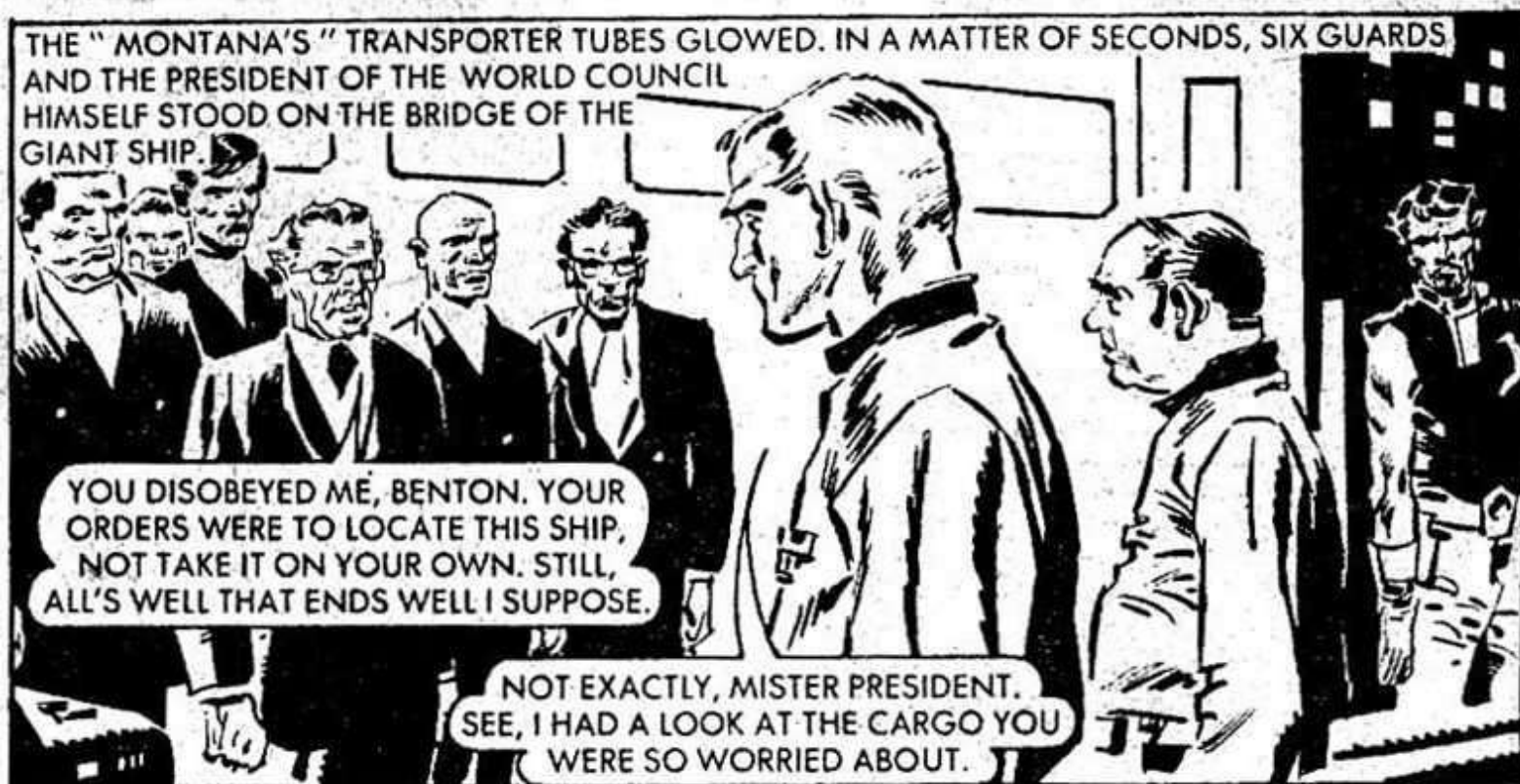


AFTER A SHORT WAIT, GROSSMAN HIMSELF SPOKE TO THE 'MONTANA'.

AH, BENTON. YOU'VE FOUND
OUR MISSING SHIP THEN.
WHAT OF HER CARGO, AND
THE MAN WHO STOLE IT?

IT'S A LONG STORY, SIR. THE CARGO
HOLD IS LOCKED AND BARRED. I
KNOW WHERE TO FIND CAPTAIN
BLOOD.







THE GUARDS NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO USE THEIR GUNS.







AXEL STEPPED IN FRONT OF THE CAMERAS.

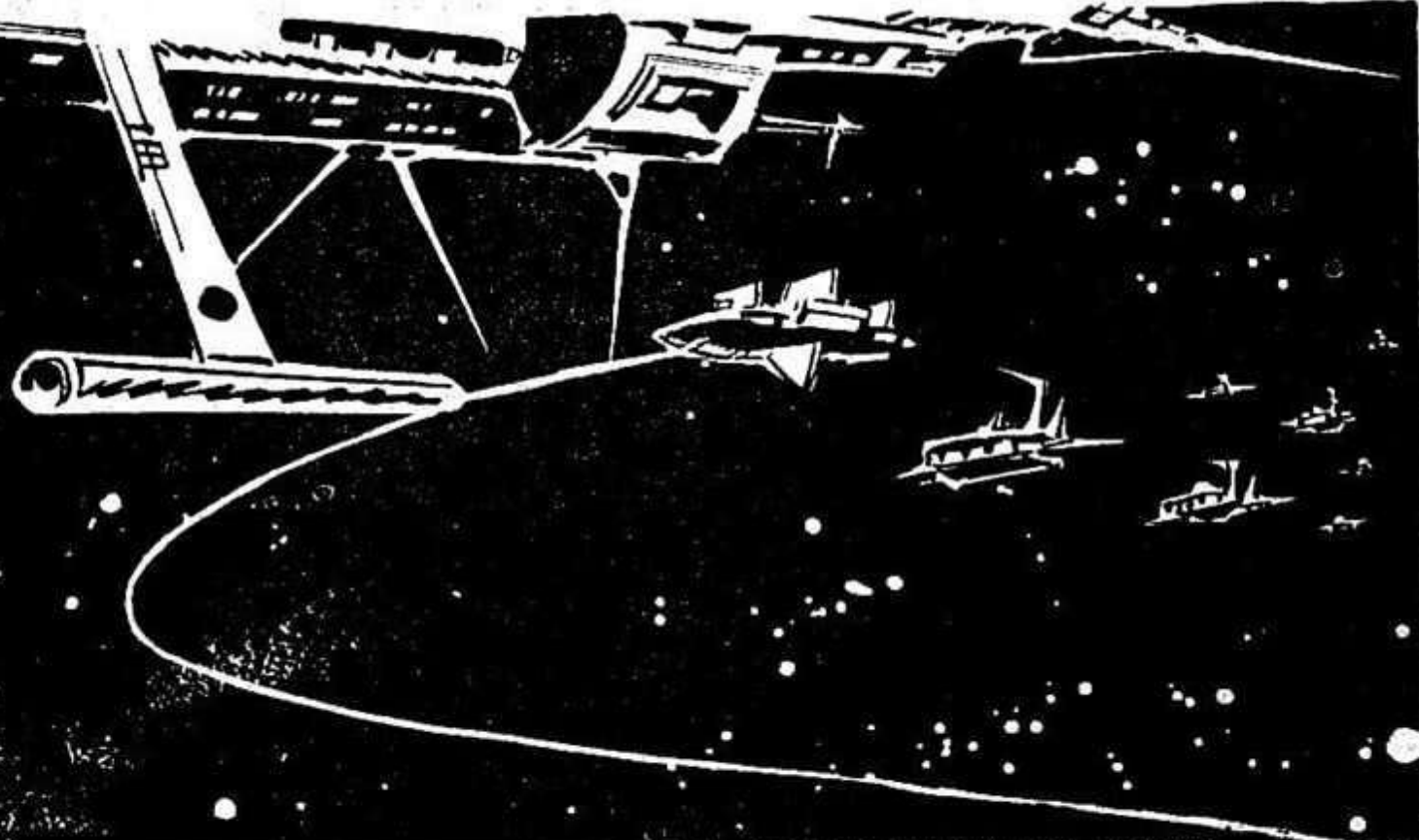
IT MAY BE EIGHT YEARS TOO LATE, BUT I INTEND TO FIGHT THE SORIONS. LET'S RID OURSELVES OF THIS MENACE ONCE AND FOR ALL. I AM HOLDING POSITION SECTOR 473/AST ... ALL SHIPS OF THE SPACE NAVY ARE REQUESTED TO RENDEZVOUS THERE.



GROSSMAN WAS LED AWAY BY THERISH TO BE LOCKED IN ONE OF THE "MONTANA'S" HOLDS.

I CAN'T LEAD AN INVASION OF SORION IN A CARGO SHIP. LET'S TRANSFER BACK TO THE "DARK SUN." THERISH WILL TAKE MONTANA HOME.





WITHIN ONE SPACIAL OF AXEL'S BROADCAST, THE ENTIRE SPACE NAVY HAD ARRIVED AT THE RENDEZVOUS POINT.

ABOARD THE "DARK SUN" A HIGH LEVEL MEETING TOOK PLACE.

WE'RE PREPARED TO PLACE THE ENTIRE RESOURCES OF THE SPACE NAVY AT YOUR DISPOSAL.



NOT MY DISPOSAL, GENTLEMEN, CAPTAIN BLOOD'S. HE HAS BETTER CRAFT. THEIR SUPERIOR WEAPONRY AND BETTER HANDLING WILL BE OF GREAT VALUE . . . AND WE'LL NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET. I DON'T THINK YOU'D DENY THAT, WOULD YOU?

THE HUGE FLEET SET A COURSE FOR SORION.

THE JOURNEY TO SORION WAS LONG, BUT WITHOUT INCIDENT. AS THE EARTH FLEET DREW NEAR TO THE PLANET, EVERY MAN WAS AWARE THAT THE FIGHT WOULD NOT BE LONG IN COMING.

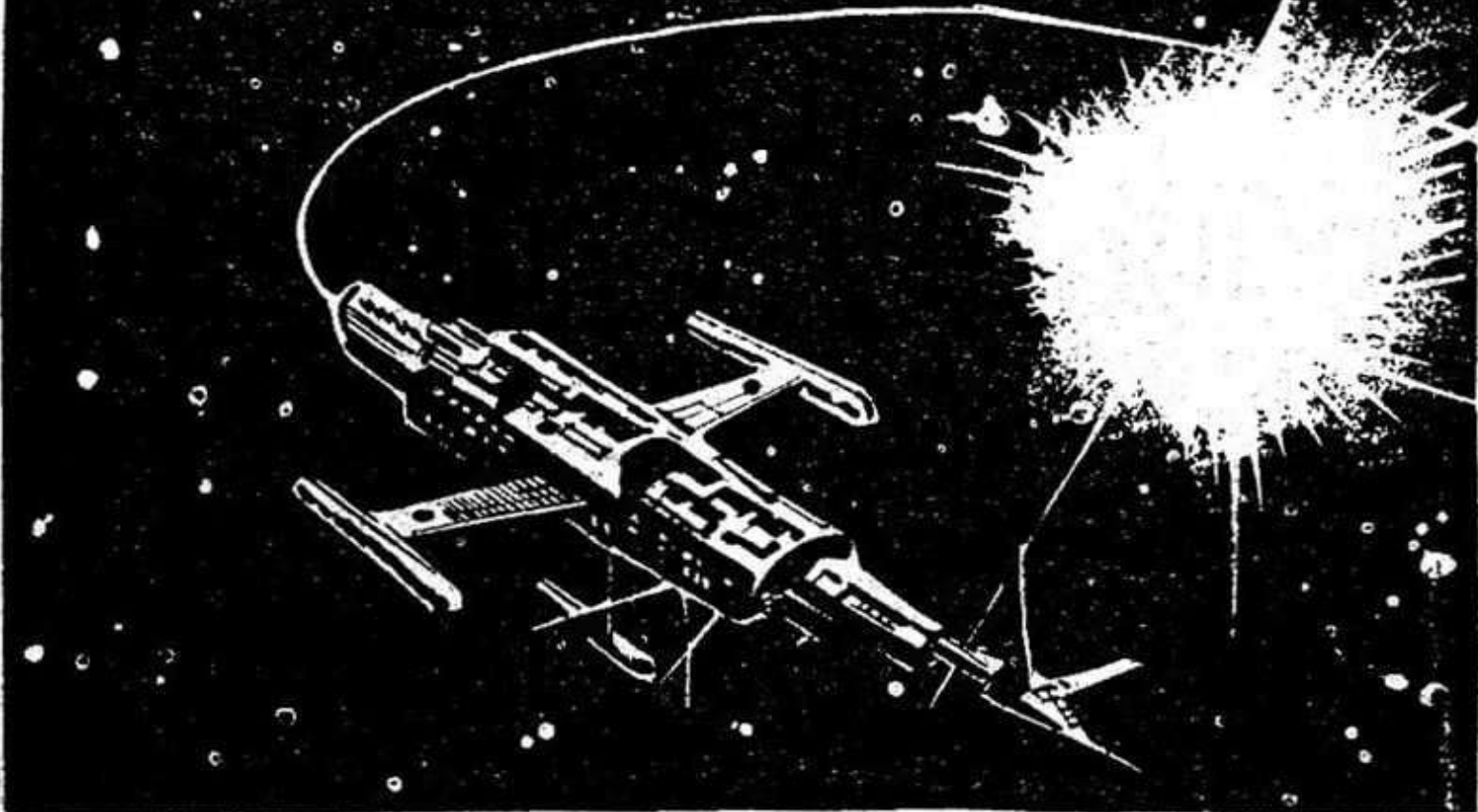
CAPTAIN BLOOD TO ALL SHIPS...
HERE THEY COME. BATTLE PLAN
Z1.AZ GOOD LUCK!





THE BATTLE WAS FIERCE.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN, THE IMMENSE SKILL OF THE PIRATES
PROVED TOO MUCH FOR THE SORIONS.



BUT THE SORIONS SUPERIOR NUMBERS
TOOK THEIR TOLL.




WE'RE TAKING
A HAMMERING.

THANKS, PIRATE. YOU
SAVED OUR BACON.




THE BATTLE RAGED FOR HOURS WITH NEITHER SIDE GAINING ANY GROUND.



WE CAN'T GO ON LIKE THIS...
WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF SHIPS.
WE'LL HAVE TO GO DOWN TO THE
PLANET'S SURFACE AND DESTROY
THEIR GROUND CONTROL
COMPUTER.

Y'MEAN, THE SYSTEM THAT
CO-ORDINATES THEIR BATTLE
PLAN.

AXEL TIPPED THE CRAFT INTO A DEATH SPIRAL.



THAT'S ANOTHER
ONE AWAY.

THAT FANCY FLYING FOOLED
THEM INTO THINKING WE'D BEEN SHOT DOWN.



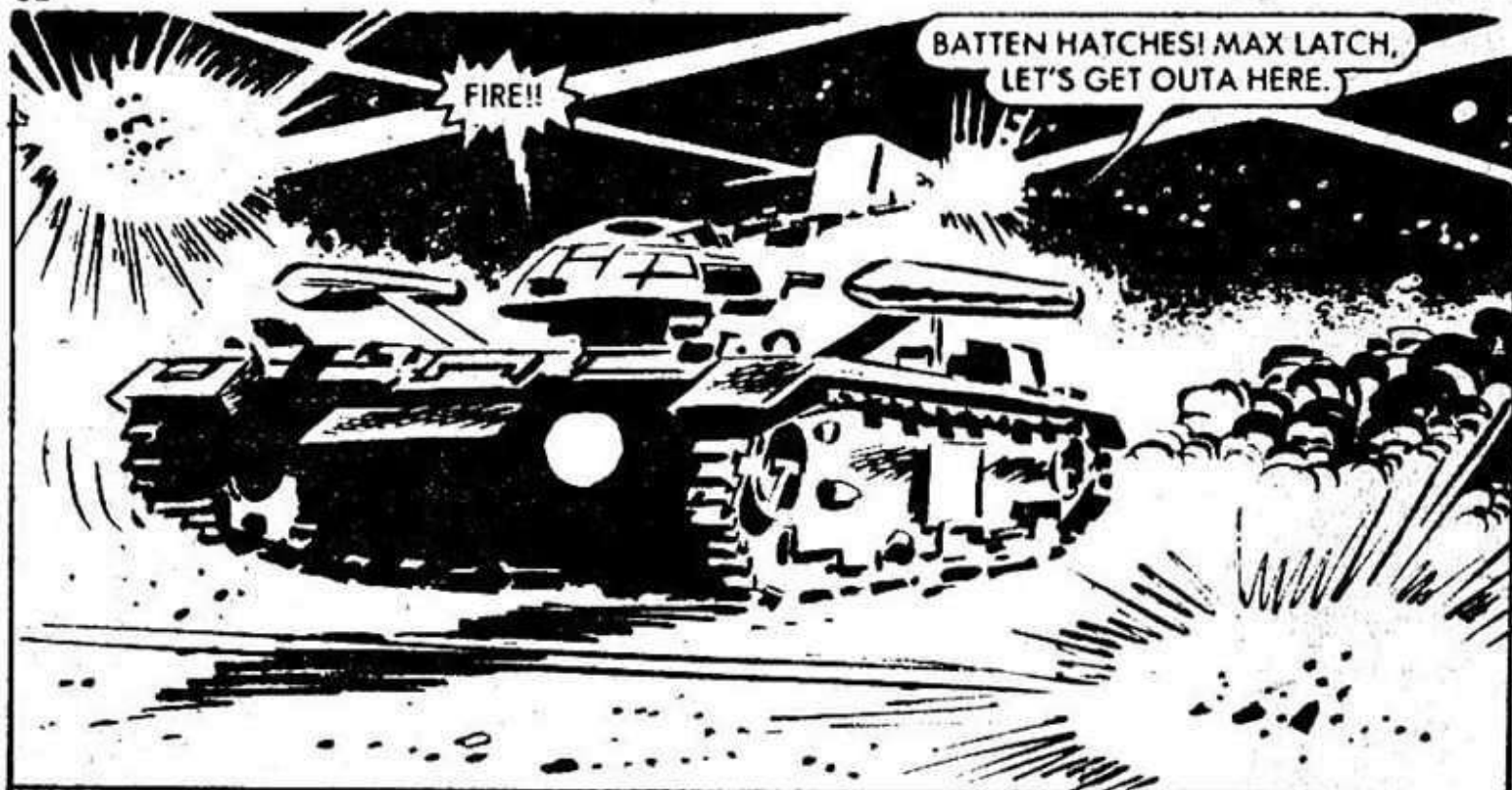
THE DARK SUN TOUCHED DOWN AT A SORION SPACEPORT.

THEY QUICKLY COMMANDEERED A PHOTON TANK.

THAT'S THE COMMUNICATIONS
DOME OVER THERE.

I'VE GOT IT ... LOAD THE NUCLEAR TORPS ...

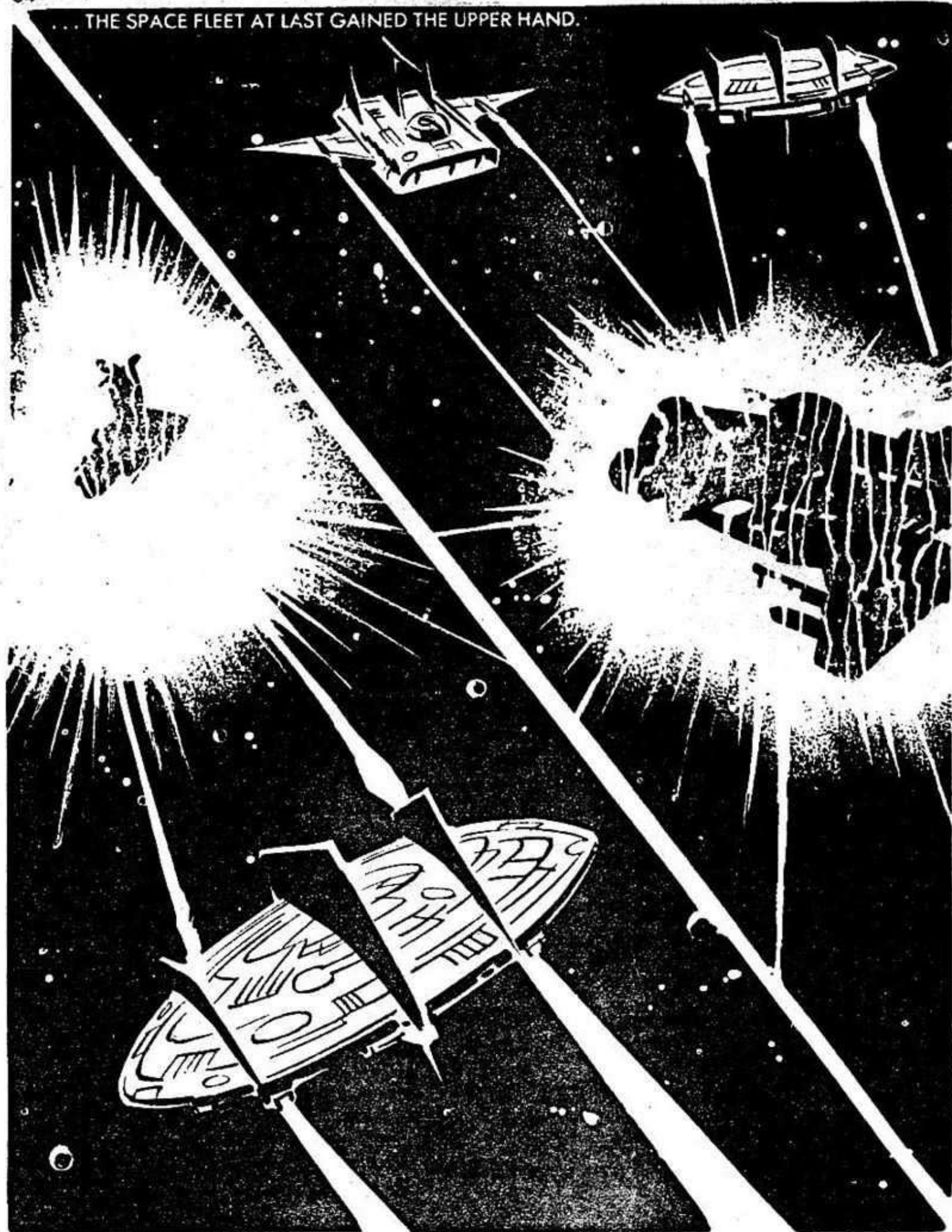




WITH THE COMMUNICATIONS DOME DESTROYED, THE SORIONS CLEVERLY CO-ORDINATED BATTLE PLAN FELL APART. EMIR AND AXEL MOPPED UP RESISTANCE AND FREED THE EARTH SLAVES . . .



... THE SPACE FLEET AT LAST GAINED THE UPPER HAND.




EIGHT YEARS OF SLAVE TRADING WAS OVER. ALL THE EARTH CHILDREN WERE PUT ABOARD THE 'DARK SUN'.



WELL, THAT'S THAT. WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO NOW?

RETURN TO EARTH AND STAND A COURTMARTIAL. I THINK THE WORST I'LL GET IS A FIVE YEAR BANISHMENT TO THE GAMMA CONSTELLATION. WITH A BIT OF LUCK MAYBE THEY'LL LET ME KEEP MY FLEET AND MEN... SECONDED TO THE SPACE NAVY.





IT FEELS PRETTY GOOD TO BE ON
THE SIDE OF LAW AND JUSTICE FOR
A CHANGE.

I MUST ADMIT, I ENJOYED MY SHORT
TIME AS A PIRATE.

TWO BROTHERS
SEPARATED BY HATE,
WERE RE-UNITED BY
HATE. HATE FOR
EXPLOITATION AND
SLAVERY.

**NOW THAT YOU'VE READ
THIS**

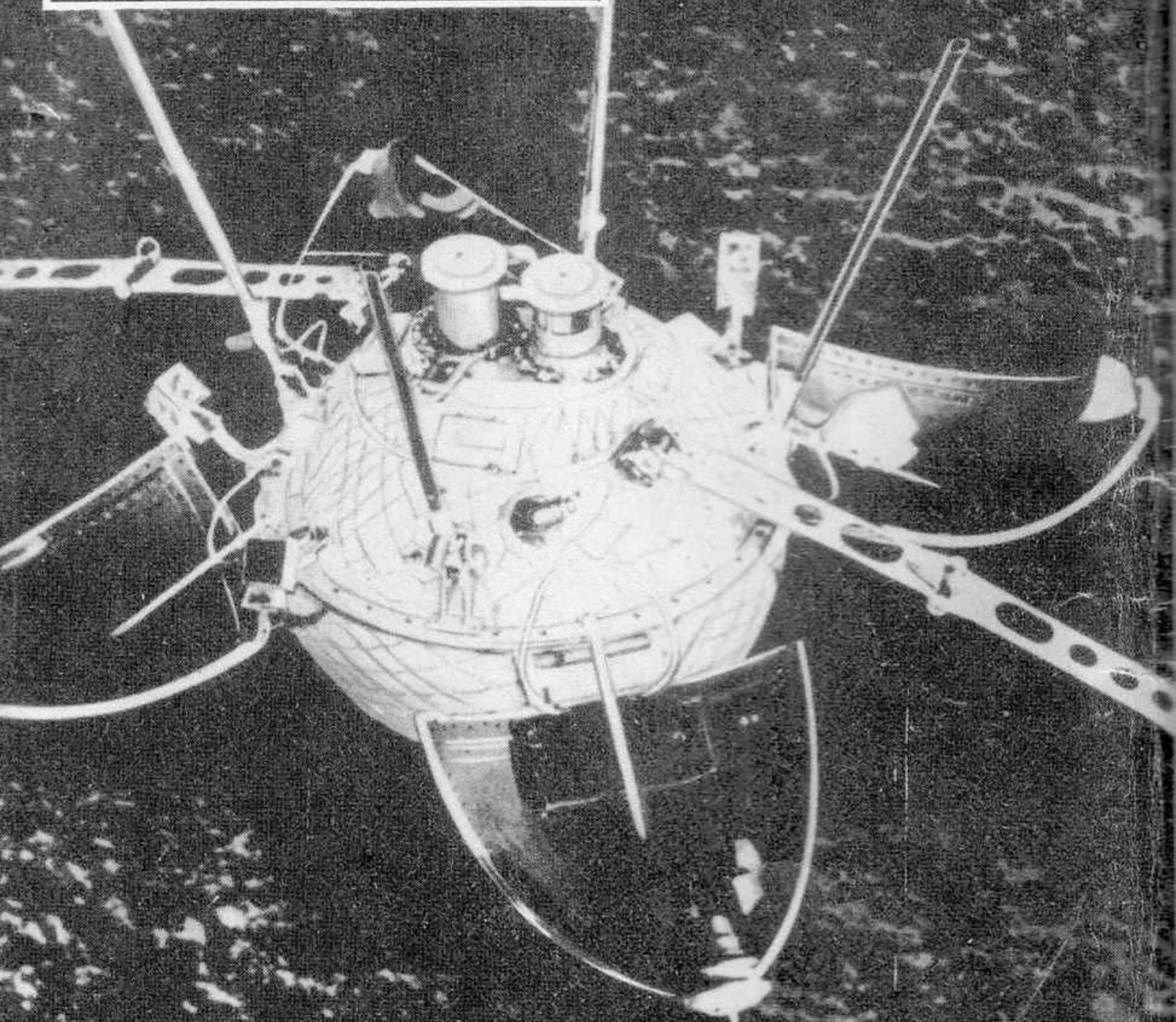


**DON'T
FORGET
THAT
THERE'S
ANOTHER
ONE THIS
MONTH**

**IT'S ON SALE IN
YOUR NEWSAGENT'S NOW!**

STARBLAZERS

IN THE CONQUEST OF SPACE 22



In January 1966 photographs from the Russian Luna 9 were beamed to Earth after the craft's "soft" landing. Luna 9 dropped from its crashing mother ship, hit the Moon at great speed and bounced across the surface, finally coming to a stop the right way up.